



Green Space Benefits

Winter 2009

They're a staple in eco-warriors' arsenal. Trees and green spaces have long been touted for their carbon dioxide absorbing ways, their ability to create shade and reduce energy costs.

Turns out the benefits of natural and landscaped green spaces also have some rather remarkable social benefits, being touted by non-profit Landscape Ontario.

Think lowering crime rates, subduing road rage and helping children think more clearly.

Landscape Ontario recently compiled the findings of several studies conducted in large U. S. cities to show that green spaces are not only good for the planet, they're good for people socially and psychologically as well.

One study, featured on the organization's website, includes a 30- year look at how landscaping projects boost self-esteem and lower vandalism.

Others trumpet the effects of green spaces on children's attention and ability to cope with life's stresses. They also create a strong sense of community that improves well-being and safety.

But the most surprising one of all for Denis Flanagan, the organization's public relations director, was a University of Washington study found that road rage is less likely to occur when nature is in view. Flanagan only needs to see it himself to believe it -- and feel the effects.

He pointed to the City of Toronto commissioning the planting of spring bulbs two years ago along the Don Valley Parkway, infamous for its traffic snarls. The daffodils and hyacinths gave drivers something other than brake lights to look at while stopped in traffic. It's for those reasons that we should be thankful we're the Garden City and not a concrete jungle, he said.

"A community that could have been a potential trouble spot where people hang out with nothing to do" has been turned into an oasis of community gardens and parks -- gathering places that help build close-knit communities, Flanagan said.

"People just feel better when they're surrounded by nature and taking it in," he added.

Getting out and using green spaces promotes a sense of pride of place, he said, explaining the psycho-social effects.

It certainly has a role to play in lowering incidents of vandalism near high schools or apartment blocks, particularly when the people living or going to school there have a role to play in planting trees and flowers, Flanagan said.

Landscape Ontario's mission is to advance the province's horticulture industry. The organization is working with the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre to find tree species that will survive the harsh conditions along roadways to allow for more nature to appease us as we're moving to and fro along the province's highways.

The studies are available at www.landscapeontario.com.

By Matthew Van Dongen and Tiffany Mayer,
Niagara Falls Review, November 16/09